

Searching for God in Vancouver

At the Winter Olympics this month in Canada, the world will  hear about Jesus from athletes and hundreds of visiting evangelists.

Kathy Kreiner-Phillips is no stranger to the Holy Spirit's way of working quietly behind the scenes. In 1976, the year she won a gold medal in giant slalom skiing at the Winter Olympics in Austria, she experienced an inexplicable draw toward Christ.

"I took in a movie, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, a couple of days before my race, and I came out in tears," she says. "I was kind of affected by it, and I couldn't stop thinking about the injustice of what happened to Jesus. Then I went back to my Anglican roots, thought of the Lord's Prayer and I said a prayer to God on the chair lift, 'Well Lord, Your will be done in regards to my performance.' It allowed me to be relaxed in my race. I knew I could win if I stayed relaxed and didn't make a mistake, and I did."

Although Kreiner-Phillips didn't fully commit her life to Christ until 1988 when she met her future husband, she says the experience showed her the importance of being there for an athlete who's truly searching for God and for some support.

"I understand where athletes are coming from and how to connect with them," says Kreiner-Phillips, who has been working with Youth for Christ for the last five years and will be serving as a chaplain during the Winter Olympics this month in Vancouver, British Columbia. "It will just be a casual kind of connection to let them know that we're there. When I was competing, we didn't know of any Christian organizations or chaplaincy offered to the athletes."

Kreiner-Phillips is one of thousands of Christians who will be reaching out to athletes and the scores of international visitors who will gather in Vancouver for the Winter Olympics February 12-28. Some 300,000 guests are expected to frequent the two major Olympic sites in Vancouver and nearby Whistler/Blackcomb ski resort to watch athletes compete in 86 winter sports, from downhill skiing to bob sledding.

Approximately 2,000 Christians from North America and Europe will be among them, serving the visitors and engaging in friendship evangelism. Coordinated by the interdenominational ministry More Than Gold (MTG), the volunteers include missions teams from the Salvation Army, which will be providing canteens and coffee; the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; Power to Change Ministries (previously Campus Crusade for Christ, Canada); and the Alpha course.

"We want to see the church have an impact through a whole movement of hospitality so we'll see transformation for our cities," says MTG staffer Karen Reed, an ordained pastor with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. "In Vancouver, we have the lowest church attendance of any city in North America."

Christian volunteers will be stationed at 17 commuter stations across Vancouver, where they will help answer logistical questions and be a general love witness. There also will be 14 venues, including open stages, where Christian artists of various genres will perform for a total of 400 hours during the Olympics and the Paralympics for disabled athletes, which will immediately follow the traditional games.

MTG is also partnered with a nonprofit organization called Home for the Games, a network that provides visitors reasonably priced accommodations in Vancouver-area homes. Half the proceeds will support local homeless charities with a goal of raising \$1 million to combat homelessness, Reed says.

Although MTG has coordinated Christian volunteer efforts at

both Summer and Winter Olympics for 15 years, Reed says this year marks the first time the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has acknowledged MTG's presence before the games. She says 15 denominations from the Vancouver area are involved in the outreach.

"More Than Gold has been involved with the Olympics for quite a long time, 15 years, but this is the first time that so many denominations—15 across the greater Vancouver area—have been involved," says Reed, who describes herself as an urban missionary in a city rife with homelessness, drug abuse and sex trafficking. "We seek to be a neutral organization not for or against the Olympics. We're a network which wants to facilitate diversity of the Christian community in terms of service, witness and social justice."

In addition to their evangelistic efforts, Canadian Christians are standing against human trafficking, which often experiences an uptick during international events such as the Olympics. In August, some 10,000 Christians participating in TheCry prayer event prayed that the Winter Olympics would not bring a rise in human trafficking, crime and violence.

"We're thankful that this is going to be a blessing to our economy, but we don't want these other things to come in," says TheCry founder Faytene Kryskow. "We don't want an increase of the sex trade; we don't want an increase of crime and violence and all these things."

Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops in Vancouver echoed that sentiment in November when they released a statement saying they planned to stand united in opposing the "social ill of human trafficking." The leaders, who are part of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Bishops' Dialogue, cited a U.S. State Department report putting the number of people trafficked across national borders each year at roughly 800,000.

"The buying and selling of human beings subverts the very

essence of the Olympic spirit," the bishops wrote.

"We call upon the faithful of our churches and all people of good will to uphold and defend the dignity of every human person," they added. "We pray that the solidarity and success of the Olympic Games will give a new respect for human life around the world."

Behind the scenes, Olympic chaplains will be ministering to athletes competing at the events. Kreiner-Phillips is in charge of the chaplains working at the Whistler Olympic site, and David Wells, general superintendent of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), will coordinate the chaplains at the Vancouver site.

"I'm very interested in leaving a legacy of Canadian Christians who are involved with sports chaplaincy," says Wells, who is chair of the interfaith working group of the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympics. He previously served as chaplain at the Pan American and Commonwealth games.

The chaplains chosen to work in the Olympic Village sites came from a pool of more than 300 names from the global Christian community and were screened by an international sports committee. The IOC mandates there should be religious services available in the Olympic villages to the five major faith groups—Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Buddhist.

"There are four or five of us ordained with PAOC at these games, and we're part of a Christian chaplaincy working group, between 30 and 40 chaplains from various denominations," Wells says.

In addition, a community chaplaincy group will serve outside the Olympic Village. The groups, from key churches and hospitality locations, will be available for visitors if a crisis or other need arises.

As an outreach tool for churches, Athletes in Action has developed a DVD series based on true stories of Christian Olympic athletes who've overcome terrible obstacles, such as Canadian speed skater Cindy Klassen when she was cut from the women's hockey team. "The point of it is to help people who identify with a particular athlete have hope that they can overcome their obstacles, too," says Olympic chaplain Dave Klassen, who is also national pro director for Athletes in Action Canada.

Wells says he's praying that the Holy Spirit will set divine appointments during the games: "I like to believe daily for a divine encounter—that one divine appointment at that divinely appointed time—for an athlete, a sports official or whoever I can help in their life somehow." 3

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ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

To view videos of these and other Christian Olympic athletes competing or sharing their testimonies, visit [here](#).

NBC/USOC

faith on the ice and snow

Christian athletes will be competing for gold medals in multiple events when the Vancouver games begin February 12.

KELLY CLARK (USA)
SNOWBOARDING

Kelly Clark refers to it as "the fall heard around the world."

Entering the 2006 Winter Olympics, Clark was the odds-on favorite to repeat as gold medalist in the snowboarding halfpipe event. But even though a nasty spill erased that dream, a decision to accept Christ two years earlier provided a much softer landing. "If I hadn't had that shift in my life, I think my world would have come crumbling down," Clark says.

Prior to 2004, Clark's life was consumed by snowboarding. Her world-class journey started as a 7-year-old at Vermont's Mount Snow ski resort and has resulted in a globetrotting career chock-full of jaw-dropping medal performances.

"I thought that being successful and achieving my goals would go hand-in-hand with being happy," Clark says. "But by the time I was 18 years old, I had achieved everything that was in my heart to do and at the same time I wasn't finding fulfillment."

On the verge of quitting her dream job, Clark randomly approached a Christian woman who was staying in the same hotel. After overhearing the phrase, "God still loves you," she couldn't ignore an undeniable "stirring" within her spirit. And now, Clark taps into the kind of creativity that only comes from the Creator Himself.

"There's no place where you can get freedom apart from Him," Clark says. "I've brought that freedom into my snowboarding. It really does set me apart from a lot of the athletes. I get to do what I love with the One that I love. There's no better way to do it than with that kind of freedom."

CHAD HEDRICK (USA)

SPEED SKATING

When you watch the Winter Olympics this year, you might see someone who resembles mega speed skating star Chad Hedrick.

You know, the brash American who won gold in his first Olympic race (5,000 meter) then went on to claim silver in the 10,000-meter and bronze in the 1,500-meter races?

Perhaps you remember Hedrick as the wild party animal who boldly predicted he would match Eric Heiden's record five gold medals from 1984. Maybe it was the public feud with fellow American Shani Davis, whom Hedrick called out for not competing in a team event. Yes, you might see a guy who looks a lot like Chad Hedrick, but it's not him. Well, at least not anymore.

"I was this major, fierce competitor that hated to lose," Hedrick recalls. "I used to want to throw my skates when I lost. I was trying to show everybody that I was the best in the world. If there was a guy competing against me, I wanted him to be scared of me. I wanted to intimidate him."

For Hedrick, that formula was, quite honestly, pretty successful. He set three American records and half a dozen world records. But it was his marriage to wife Lynsey and her Christian influence that helped him realize he was missing an important piece of the equation.

"I'd never really acknowledged the Lord and never appreciated what He's given me," Hedrick says. "But He continued to bless me on a daily basis. Even though I didn't show Him any love at all, He gave me something special. Now I want to bring glory to His name. I want to be a positive role model and hopefully open people's eyes to the good life."

Follow Chad Hedrick's journey to the 2010 Winter Olympics at

JAROME IGINLA (CANADA) ICE HOCKEY

It was eight years ago in Salt Lake City when Jarome Iginla caught his first glimpse of Olympic glory. Feeling like a kid

in a candy store, the budding NHL star was too busy gawking at the jerseys hanging around the locker room to notice he didn't have a locker of his own.

"I got a chance to play with [Hall of Famers] Mario Lemieux and Steve Yzerman," Iginla recalls. "It was a big adjustment. I was one of the younger guys, and I had a makeshift area, but it was a huge thrill."

As a member of the Canadian national team, Iginla helped his country win its first gold medal in 50 years. The championship match took place against the host American squad in arguably one of the most electric hockey games in Olympic history.

Now in his 12th full season with the Calgary Flames, the five-time NHL All-Star has come a long way from his improbable upbringing as a biracial kid reared in Alberta, where by divorced parents—a Christian father from Nigeria and a Buddhist mother from Oregon—and his grandparents.

While playing junior hockey as a teenager, Iginla began exploring his father's faith. That journey has led him to a continually growing relationship with Jesus. "I'm extremely blessed in so many ways," Iginla says. "I want to serve Christ, and in doing that I want to give back in as many different ways as I can. By serving my family and friends and others, I'm trying to say thank you to God every day."

BROCK KREITZBURG (USA) BOBSLED

When Brock Kreitzburg was a kid, he used to stand in front of a mirror and practice giving interviews as an NFL star. Turns out, Kreitzburg's preparation has been quite useful—just not in the way he once imagined.

The former all-conference football player at the University of Toledo now answers probing questions about bobsledding—a sport

he admits he learned about through the iconic movie Cool Runnings.

Just six years into the sport, Kreitzburg was representing the USA in the four-man event at the 2006 Winter Olympics. While his highly touted team finished a disappointing sixth, Kreitzburg has managed to enjoy a successful career with six gold medals and seven silver medals in World Cup competition. "It's really by God's grace that I've been successful in my athletic endeavors," he says.

Kreitzburg, who accepted Christ during college, has relied heavily on his faith in the last two years. During a time when he admits to taking some of his focus away from God, he discovered a nagging hip injury that would require radical reconstructive surgery.

"This year was like I was a rookie again," Kreitzburg says. "Because I had the hip replacement, I've had to go out there and prove myself again. There have been several times that I've literally cried out to Him, but He's been faithful. My plans all crash and burn. So I trust that His plan is what's best for me."

To learn more about Brock Kreitzburg's testimony and his Olympic quest, visit [brock](#) .

ERIN PAC (USA)

BOBSLED

After six years on the competitive bobsled circuit, Erin Pac was still searching for that elusive first medal performance in the two-woman event. As she lined up on a brisk November day at the track in Whistler, British Columbia, something peculiar took place.

Pac decided to have fun and let loose. More importantly, she

chose to surrender the moment to God. "It was a very weird feeling because I'm so competitive and I don't like to lose or do poorly," Pac says. "It worked out that time because I won the bronze, but at the Olympics, I might not win a medal. My goal isn't always to win that medal, but to be happy and know that I did the best I could do on that day because He was with me."

Originally a track athlete at Springfield College in Missouri, Pac, a four-time international bobsled medalist, grew up attending church. But it was the influence of pastor Derek Strain, her team chaplain in Lake Placid, New York, that has helped her fully embrace the concept of divine purpose.

"God gives me the strength to do what I can do," Pac says. "I know He's put me here for a reason. I don't know what that reason is. That reason could be to win an Olympic medal. That reason could be to just show my light to everyone else or to be a good witness. It's taken me a long time to get that point of trust, but now I realize that it's not always about winning a medal."

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